DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 213 076 EA 014 366

AUTHOR McLeary, Lloyd E.
TITLE Toward a Reconstruction of the Principalship.
INSTITUTION Iowa Univ., Iowa City. Inst. for School Executives.
PUB DATE Dec 81
NOTE 5p.
AVAILABLE FROM Editor, The Executive Review, Institute for School Executives, University of Iowa, 210 Lindquist Center, Iowa City, IA 52242 ($1.00).
JOURNAL CIT The Executive Review; v2 n3 p1-4 Dec 1981

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Administrator Attitudes; Administrator Characteristics; *Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; Curriculum Development; Educational Change; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; *Principals; Productivity; *School Administration; School Support; Teacher Administrator Relationship
IDENTIFIERS School Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

The principalship promises to be fundamentally different in the future than it has been in the past. Throughout the seventies, social trends and studies of schooling caused a loss of confidence in the principal. Yet by the end of the decade, principals were seen to be important in affecting school productivity, as was suggested by many studies of school effectiveness. Both practitioners and scholars now tend to conceive of the role of principal as a balance of management and instructional leadership. Currently surveys show that management duties are extremely time-consuming and leave little room for instructional leadership. Furthermore, if we look to research to provide a knowledge base to support a reconstruction of the principal's role, we find that such a knowledge base does not exist. Yet there are value changes in the society that would favor a reconstruction of the principal's role. There is also a growing recognition of the centrality of the principal in school improvement. School principals clearly are in a strategic position to contribute to the solution of educational problems. Much is needed to be done in the reconstruction of the principal's role and in the support accorded that role if education is to prosper. (Author/JM)

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Volume 2, Number 3
December 1981

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The Executive Review

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TOWARD A RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Lloyd E. McCleary

The principalship appears to be entering a period in which it promises to be of a fundamentally different character than in the past. The evidence and the reasoning behind this statement is the substance of this paper. Significant points of departure for a re-examination of principalship are noted and an emerging view of the principal and the principalship is presented.

The school as an institution, the source of enlightenment and socialization of the young, has experienced a declining confidence. Effects of long-term multivariate trends, that is, enrollment declines, population shifts, inflation, and so forth, and the impacts of budget cuts, court decisions, single-issue politics, and the like have occurred at the same time as the home, church, and school have experienced declining influence in the lives of the young due to what can be termed "the advent of the mass culture." These conditions establish the climate within which schools and the people who run them must define and carry out their mission.

Though the decentralization and professionalization of public education have served as sources of protection for schools, these factors have, at the same time, created difficulties. Perhaps the most direct impact upon principals is decentralization which has led to ambiguity of goals and the lack of priority in educational programs. Decentralization has permitted the inequities which brought federal programs and the courts to intrude into the daily operation of schools. The professionalization of teachers and administrators, under the stress of conflicts and the politicalization of school systems, has split rather than integrated the profession. This only points to the fact that problems manifesting themselves in schools are embedded pervasively in the surrounding society.

Throughout the 1970s, two orientations grew and persisted which brought discomfort to those who held that the principal was central to schooling and that the principalship was a key element in maintaining the school as a viable institution. One orientation deriving from the work of Jencks,[1] Coleman,[2] and earlier Illich,[3] played upon the theme that schools were impotent, dinosaur institutions that made no difference in the lives of children and youth, even that schools were detrimental, in the long run, to those they purported to serve. The other orientation, deriving from a theory-based, scholarly tradition, put forward arguments that principals were incapable of providing professional leadership and that their proper role was to provide technical-managerial service. Gross and Herriott,[4] Wolcott,[5] and Hennaway and Sproul,[6] are representative of those who take the position that principals can no longer provide curriculum and instructional leadership or judge the effectiveness of teaching.

These two orientations became fused into an ideological view from which the principalship, as well as the school itself, came under investigation and attack. Foundations and government issued scathing reports; among them Kettering,[7] Carnegie,[8] and the Senate Committee on School Disorder[9] were perhaps most widely circulated and the most influential. The latter is a report of serious escalation in school crime when there was and continues to be a decrease in crime and disruption in the schools. During this period, however, conditions provided sufficient grounds for a persistent apprehension about the health of public education and the adequacy of its leadership. Attention turned away from the principalship as a factor in the improvement of education.

Renewed Attention to the Principalship

By the end of the last decade, the traditional, supporting coalitions which had lost confidence in the schools and their leaders and which had fallen into argument among themselves began to come to the realization that schools were not as bad as they had been painted. Further, the position of the principal and the function of the principalship began to receive attention as having the possibility of being an important factor in the educational equation.

The mass media reflect the change in attitude as illustrated by the following quotes:

> There are some bad schools with good principals, but there are no good schools with bad principals. R. Edmonds, *NAESP Communicator* 11/79.

> Good principals make good schools, and there is no way of improving the schools without more good principals. Fred Hechinger, *N.Y. Times* 5/29/79.

> The principal is the key person in any school . . . at best principals become facilitators and coordinators . . . at worst they become clerks and errand boys. T. Martland, *Business Week* 1/30/78.

Within the education community, authoritative analysis and investigative evidence began to establish a new and reasoned view of the leadership role of the principal. Again, a few illustrative quotes are offered:

> The influence of the head teacher (principal) is very considerable . . . heads of more successful schools took widely different approaches. Nevertheless, these had essential elements in common. Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, and Ouston, *Fifteen Thousand Hours* 1979.

> The principal is critical to the leadership of education needing to maintain, justify, and articulate sound comprehensive programs. . . . to seek collegial relationships through which such pro-

grams are maintained . . . and to enhance lay and other participation at the school site. John Goodlad, *Educational Leadership* 1/78.

Schools must provide the necessary conditions for improvement; these conditions are motivated primarily by the principal. Ann Lieberman and Lynne Miller, *Research Information Service* 4/81.

They (principals) initiate programs, set policy, and obtain material and fiscal resources. They are frequently the motivation and support for school improvement. Principals are particularly important because they are the designated leaders of comprehensive school units. Phi Delta Kappa, *Why Do Some Urban Schools Succeed?* 1980.

Much of the evidence about the influence of the principalship upon the quality and nature of schooling is inferential. This is so largely because the teacher and teaching is in the most direct relationship to learners. Studies which provide inferential evidence about the effects of the principal upon factors associated with quality are of four types: school productivity studies, studies of "effective" schools versus ineffective schools, studies of schools that have "turned around," and studies of effective versus randomly selected principals.

Geske[10] in a review of school productivity studies concludes that "studies suggest some important variables within the control of administrators. Among these are the use of teachers' time, teacher verbal ability, and certain combinations of teachers and students." The primary independent variable in these studies is learner achievement. However, the variables cited can be controlled to some extent by principals, and Geske concludes that school administrators can make an important difference in controlling school productivity.

In both the effective school[11] and "turn-around school" studies,[12] four categories of factors usually are compared across samples of schools matched by such factors as financial support behind each pupil. The four categories of factors are: (1) intake—learner entry achievement, self-esteem, aspiration levels, and so forth; (2) process—teacher expectations, homework, access to teachers and support staff, time on task, and so forth; (3) school climate—treatment of students, organized curriculum, pleasant, safe environment, and so forth; and (4) outcomes—levels of achievement, developed talents, views of self, and so forth. No single factor has been found to be of greater weight in producing improved outcome measures. Thus, continuity in a school in working toward improvement of all factors and deliberate monitoring of them is regarded to be the best strategy for attaining educational effectiveness. Again, researchers conclude that the principal is a key element in affecting school productivity.

The NASSP National Senior High School Principal Study[13] employed a complex nominating process to identify effective principals and then contrasted data about effective principals with data from a random sample of principals. Both samples were drawn from the entire country and represented equivalent schools in terms of size and type of community. Both questionnaire and in-depth interview data were obtained and the following characteristics appear to distinguish effective principals from the random sample:

1. Arrival at position—more formal training, backgrounds tended to be social sciences, served as teacher and administrator but spent less time in each (3 to 5 years), arrived at position during problem or conflict.
2. View of the job—rated job conditions much higher: more prestige and security, more independence, more self-fulfillment; more satisfied with the principalship, used terms such as "this is where the action is" and "this is the place to be"; rated constraints as much less in number and severity.
3. Relationships—more satisfied with teachers, more critical of central office, more involvement both of teachers and of those outside the school, sees interpersonal conflict as less severe, and less of a problem.
4. Leadership—definitely not managers, often criticized by central office for not meeting deadlines; demanding in terms of high expectations; troubled by incompetent teachers, unmotivated students, and apathetic teachers; had clear priorities, definite strategies for getting things done, and an agenda for the future.
5. Stress—rated constraints as much less in number and in severity, described conflict in impersonal ways, freely discussed failures and shortcomings, rated stress as lower and usually as stimulating, listed many more ways of personally dealing with stress.
6. View of education—described role as relating the program to issues and to student needs, more troubled about the future of education, belonged to and more active in professional organizations, traveled more for personal and professional reasons.

The national study provides a view of the principal as a person and offers some insight into the characteristics which may contribute to success in the principalship.

Conceptions of the Role

There is little question that the history of educational administration can be characterized as having identifiable periods in which the practice of administration is influenced by a dominant perspective. Goodlad[14] describes three such periods which he labels charismatic-autocratic, replaced by an emphasis upon technical-managerial principles, now being replaced by a pragmatic school-based leadership approach. Button[15] in a more detailed analysis identifies five distinct "doctrines" of educational administration in which he concludes that the current period is characterized by the submergence of the applied behavioral science era, and he expresses the view that "the next doctrine of administration will be indigenous." He believes that this perspective will be built upon "knowledge of schools and administration and of educational policy."

Those who have credentials as practitioners and/or a scholarly interest in the principalship tend to conceive of the role of principal as a balance of management and instructional leadership. Roe and Drake[16] provide a list of ten major responsibilities under the heading administrative-managerial emphasis and nine major responsibilities under the heading educational leadership emphasis. Lipham and Hoeh[17] offer a definition to distinguish leadership from management stating that leadership is "that behavior which initiates a new structure in interaction within a social system; it initiates change in goals, objectives, configurations, procedures, input, processes, and ultimately the outputs . . ."; management is a maintenance function. Hencley and McCleary[18] project three levels of responsibility: operational management, institutional leadership, and participation in planning and policymaking; and they provide lists of key responsibilities which they identified from studies of what principals actually do in the job.

The National Senior High School Principal Study already cited and a national survey of elementary principals conducted during the same time period by the National Association of Elementary School Principals[19] elicited rankings of major responsibilities from principals. Elementary principals listed the following areas of responsibility in rank order as actually performed in terms of time allocated: (1) supervision, (2) administration, (3) clerical, (4) curriculum development, (5) community/parents, (6) self-improvement, and (7) teaching. They then ranked these seven items as they would desire them to be. Curriculum development moved to third place, self-improvement to fourth place, and clerical to seventh with the others remaining in order. Secondary principals provided rankings of a slightly different set of responsibilities in terms of time allocated as actually performed: (1)

management, (2) staff personnel, (3) activities, (4) student behavior, (5) program/curriculum, (6) district assignments, (7) planning, (8) community, and (9) professional development. The rankings by secondary principals for desired time allocations were: (1) program/curriculum, (2) staff personnel, (3) management, (4) activities, (5) planning, (6) professional development, (7) student behavior, (8) community, and (9) district assignments.

Both principals and those who speculate about their work express concern about the conditions of the job. McCleary, after examining the data of the national studies and conducting a detailed assessment of the principal's work with a national task force of principals, concluded: "These data imply to us a position heavily loaded in terms of time demands (over 50 hours per week) and one in which the allocation of effort is not in keeping with the principals' desires. The role appears to be heavily impacted, severely limiting those activities in which competencies stressed by training programs might be exploited." Continuing in regard to the use of principals in field-based training, McCleary states, "Under these circumstances alone we find it difficult to believe that the principal is in a position to assume a significant training responsibility . . . This is hardly reassuring in terms of other types of field-based experiences and even in terms of the kinds and quality of experiences that might be available to an intern."[20] There is general agreement among the authors cited here that a reconceptualization of the role of the principal is required, particularly a resolution of the managerial and instructional leadership dualism.

Toward a New Concept of Role

Interestingly, in 1929, John Dewey in *Source of a Science of Education* speculated about "where we draw so that there shall be steady and cumulative growth of intelligent, communicable insight, and power of direction (in education)." He insisted that "educational practices provide the data, the subject matter, which form the problems of inquiry. . . . They are also the final test of the value of conclusions reached."[21] He noted that the human sciences are particularly relevant for method as well as substance, but he cautioned that "Remoteness is found whenever there is a lack of vital connection between field work, practices, and research work."[22] He desired that a dynamic tension exist between the demands of the discipline and the client systems. However, no one discipline supplies the range of method and substance, and no one set of clients (districts, schools, policymakers, and so forth) exhausts the range of clients for educational administration. Talcott Parsons would partially resolve this dilemma by seeking a reasonable consensus about the "object of clinical interest."[23] We would argue here that, for the principal, this is the instructional program and the nature and quality of delivering that program to learners. Parsons lists three other essential conditions: (1) a definition of the desirable state of the object of clinical interest, including specification of the clinical values which in this case would define the administrative functions with regard to the instructional program and the delivery system, (2) identification of clinical problems, and (3) a mobilization of knowledge concerning the functioning of the school program and its delivery systems.

Just as the role of the principal, as now reported to exist, does not bode well in terms of what is needed to reconstruct itself, neither does the research and scholarly effort which could power a reconstruction of the role. David Krathwohl, in a verbal report to a U.S. Office of Education Research Policy Committee in 1979, noted the following "facts" about research in education: (1) the effort is very small in relation to other fields, such as agriculture and medicine, (2) much of the effort is used up in justifying basic social values, (3) the products of research are scattered, not incremental, and therefore not very useful, (4) research in education over-promises on results and creates unrealistic expectations, and (5) pressing needs in the schools will continue to produce fads and frills rather than sound, long-term development. To the extent that Krathwohl is correct, both the scholarly side and the practice side are working under severe handicaps, and under these conditions, it appears imperative that both sides seek the means to work together.

Accepting the pessimistic view about the current condition of the principalship and a healthy pessimism, there is at least a changing climate which favors a changing conception of the role of the principal. First, the society has clearly begun to implement certain values which would be supportive of the principal who would set instructional leadership as central. These values include: rejection of growth and "bigger is better" as implicit measures of success, rediscovery of the primary group, removing one's vocation as the primary focus of one's life, and so forth. Second, economically, there is less margin for error, and power will need to be given to operational levels of the schools, hopefully reducing bureaucratic control. Third, high technology and the mass media, although costly and once a source of problems for education, show signs of being successfully used in schools and classrooms. Fourth, studies[25] have begun to show a public desire to cool the conflicts and attacks involving schools, new and supportive coalitions appear to be regrouping, there is a growing realization that improving schools will take time and effort, and that priorities must be clarified.

Within the education community, the growing recognition of the centrality of the principal in school improvement is based upon the acceptance of the fact that there exists enormous situational specificity, that value questions are fundamental to consensus building and hence to problem resolution, and that these need to be dealt with at the school level, that careers in teaching and administration are in danger, and that reconstruction of roles to provide satisfying careers must be accorded high priority, and finally, that every tested strategy for change in education relies upon the principal for successful implementation.[26] In short, schools can best be understood and can function best when treated as "loosely coupled" rather than as bureaucratic organizations.

Button's belief that a reconceptualization of the principal's role rests upon the triad of knowledge of schools, administration, and educational policy appears to be sound, but only if each leg of the triad is understood in terms of the conditions presented here. The climate for reconstruction of the principal's role appears to be altering to favor a reconstruction, the linkages between practitioners and scholars is tenuous, the capabilities of each are questionable at this time, the knowledge base to effect a reconstruction remains largely uncodified. Yet, there is a consciousness of what is required and an evidence of the will to put the pieces together.

As one of our generals once said, "I am surrounded on all sides and being assaulted in front, I shall attack." Public education has a demonstrated will to attack its problems. School principals clearly are in a strategic position to contribute to the solution of educational problems. However, much is needed to be done in the reconstruction of the principal's role and in the support accorded that role if education is to prosper.

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Lloyd E. McCleary is professor of educational administration and director of the R & D lab, The University of Utah. Professor McCleary directed the National High School Principal Study sponsored by NASSP completed in 1979, and a follow-up study on the principalship sponsored by the Rockefeller Family Fund. He has authored texts on both elementary and secondary school administration as well as numerous articles and monographs on school-based management and leadership. He has directed projects in education for the U.S. Department of State, the Agency for International Development, the World Bank, and currently, the Department of Defense Dependent Schools. He is director of a long-term project to develop and field test individualized modules for administrator in-service education.

THE EXECUTIVE REVIEW
Published eight times a year by

The University of Iowa
210 Lindquist Center
Iowa City, Iowa 52242

Institute for School Executives

William C. Bozeman, *Editor*
George A. Chambers, *Director*

2816/12-81